

Why the United Front Failed:

Disruptive Role of the PAC

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Dr Y.M. Dadoo, New Age, Johannesburg, 29 March 1962

'The South Africa United Front has been dissolved', said the statement issued by representatives of the ANC, PAC, SWANU and SAIC, Messrs Oliver Tambo, Nana Mahomo, J. Kozonguizi and Dr Y. Dadoo respectively, after a meeting of the South Africa United Front held in London on 13 March 1962.

Behind this bland statement lies the history of the Front's achievements and also of the causes which led to its tragic downfall.

The South African United Front was formed abroad soon after the Sharpeville massacre, when the Verwoerd Government had unleashed a regime of terror, murder and violence. Our leading organisations were suppressed and many of our leaders and other democrats were detained without trial.

OUR AIM

We then felt that despite the deep differences that marked the policies of the ANC and with it the SAIC on the one hand and the PAC on the other, this crisis was so overwhelming in character as to demand of those of us abroad the joining of our forces in a united front with a view to seeking the sympathy and support of the peoples and governments of the world for our struggles, to bring international economic and political pressure on the South African Government and in general to secure its expulsion from the world community of nations.

We believed that by uniting with this purpose we would help and inspire our peoples and bring nearer the victory of their struggles.

Much was achieved in the early stages of the United Front's existence. By concentrating on what was common to all our policies and aims, we succeeded in winning wide international support for our cause. The trade boycott became one of the most important and, politically at least, the most effective instrument of world solidarity against apartheid.

We won effective support from virtually every independent African state. Largely through our efforts South Africa had to withdraw from the Commonwealth.

DIVISIONS

However, these successes by themselves had not proved strong enough to consolidate or develop the unity of the United Front. Instead, the United Front became increasingly ineffective. It soon reached the point where it was doing little if anything to further the aims and tasks we had originally set ourselves. As a result the Front quickly fell into disrepute.

United Fronts in general demand a high level of discipline and integrity from their participants. They call for absolute honesty and frankness, for a regular discussion of outstanding problems and difficulties and above all for unity in action. They forbid public attacks of one partner by another. They prohibit conspiracies, underhand schemes designed to undermine one or other partner of the front.

This discipline has been shown to be of no less importance by the SAUF. We knew that existence as a united front depended heavily on the absence of recrimination and attack on each other and of our organisations in South Africa.

The ANC and the SAIC representatives tried hard to maintain the integrity of the United Front on these bases. They conscientiously held back from expounding their own policies abroad in their design to maintain faithfully the unity of the Front. They refused, in spite of repeated provocations, to engage in attacks on their principal partner the PAC. They always confronted their partners with common problems and had even compromised aspects of their policies -all with a view to maintaining the unity and cohesion of the Front.

SLANDER CAMPAIGN

On the other hand, the PAC had acted differently. The PAC and its overseas representatives and members - despite their presence in the Front - had already at an earlier stage embarked on a campaign of wilful slander and attack on the African National Congress and its leaders.

They directed their energy mainly towards establishing for the PAC the image that it alone was the leading organisation of the African people, commanding overwhelming support - a wholly fraudulent image in terms of the actual balance of strength of our organisations in South Africa.

Through malicious distortion and lies, the ANC was presented as being both conservative and the instrument of Communists, whites and Indian merchants.

Behind the back of the United Front, the PAC representatives worked for privileged contacts with governments and public organisations abroad.

Within the Front itself, the PAC representatives proved to be particularly difficult allies; they tried to foist their organisation's chauvinistic policies on the Front itself. They persistently refused to permit the Front to invite the support of other well-known anti-Apartheid forces in South Africa.

These unprincipled methods of the PAC abroad were matched by a particularly treasonable PAC act towards the struggle of our people in South Africa itself. After having been invited and given positions of importance in the campaign for a National Convention and a three-day national strike in May last, members of the PAC withdrew at a vital stage of the campaign's preparations. Not stopping at this attempt to sow confusion, the PAC then treacherously tried to scab the strike by distributing anti-strike leaflets. Any basis for unity in South Africa was thus removed.

Furthermore, we understand that the PAC organisation abroad is now split into two sections each claiming to speak in the name of the organisation, one having expelled the other and both engaging in mutual recrimination of a most embarrassing kind. This has created abroad considerable doubt about the authority and political substance of the PAC representatives.

These then are the factors which have led to the dissolution of the United Front. This regrettable course may cause some disquiet among many of our supporters and friends. We are, however, confident that they will understand the reasons for the dissolution and will continue to support the cause we have stood for: the winning of a free and democratic South Africa, of full and equal opportunities for all our people based on a common non-racial citizenship, of one man one vote and the liberation of our people from the poverty and ignorance so assiduously fostered by the regime of apartheid.

Course: National Democratic Revolution

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